

INI - SDG

Christmas Day
December 25, 2008
Hecla

Text: Revelation 7:9-17

Theme: THE COLORS OF CHRISTMAS: WHITE

- The need to be cleansed
- The cleaning agent

Dear fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, who follow in the footsteps of the shepherds on that first Christmas night and come with haste to the Lord's house to see that thing which the Lord has made know to you - the birth of your Savior, who is Christ the Lord!

Fellow redeemed,

This time of year is one of the most colorful seasons. Families buy lights, ornaments, and trees to decorate their homes for Christmas. People work out in the cold to string lights around their house and decorate their yards with lights, nativity scenes, and other Christmas images. The colors of Christmas are one of the things that make this time of year so enjoyable. And so this Advent season we've been examining the colors of Christmas and applying those colors to our lives in Christ.

The first color of Christmas that we considered was the color GREEN. We associate the color green with life. At this time of year in our neck of the woods, however, there isn't much green to be seen in nature. By Christmas time all the plants have died or gone dormant awaiting the warm spring sunshine. The leaves have all fallen from the trees. About the only green plant life to be seen around here is the hardy evergreen tree. And so we use that evergreen tree (or an artificial version of it) to decorate our homes.

The color green is a good reminder of the life that the Christ-child came to bring us. He was born to give us life and give it to the full! Much like the landscape and nature is dead at this time of year, so too were we spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins awaiting an eternity of death in hell. So Christ was born! He was born to lay down His life to save ours! Now in Christ we are ever-green! We are full of life and await life-eternal in heaven through Him! What a fitting color green is as it reminds us of the life that the Christ-child was born to give us!

Last week we considered the color RED. We see an awful lot of red at Christmas time. There are red sweaters and dresses that we only pull out of the closet for Christmas. The red poinsettia plants are sold largely only at Christmas time. There are red lights, ornaments, and bows. The color red is a reminder of the red blood that had to shed to redeem us unto God. That precious blood of Christ that was so valuable to God that He was willing to cancel the sin-debt of every sinner. Red is also the color of love and reminds us of the blood and of the love of God in sending His Son into the world to save us. How fitting is the color RED as we consider True God becoming True Man, that He might shed His holy, precious blood to save us!

This morning we want to consider another color of Christmas. This color is a color that people hope for on Christmas. This color is so beloved at Christmas time that Bing Crosby is well known even today for singing about it. It is the color white. While we may not enjoy shoveling it or getting stuck in it, Christmas without white snow would be somewhat of a letdown.

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior-King this morning, let us consider the color WHITE which is such a part of Christmas. To guide us this morning we turn to the God-breathed words of Revelation chapter 7. In these verses the Apostle John gives us a description of the vision of heaven which he saw. Try to imagine the following scene:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

These are the very words of God. Because they are from God Himself, given through the pen of His holy writers, we can trust them and build our hope for eternal life on them. Even so we ask our heavenly Father to sanctify us - to set us apart unto Himself by His holy Word as we pray: "*Sanctify us by Your truth, Your word is truth. Amen.*"

When you hear the color white, what comes to mind? White is a color that is used to signify cleanliness and purity. We talk about someone being as pure as the "wind driven snow." The type of lambs God wanted people to sacrifice were ones without spot or blemish - lambs with white wool. Sterile environments such as hospitals and laboratories have everything colored white so any speck of dust or dirt can be clearly seen. Doctors, nurses, and staff will often wear the color white to show they are clean and sterile. The color white is the absence of color. White shirts are hard to keep clean because any spot easily shows up on it. That is why mom warned us not wear a white shirt while eating spaghetti. I imagine this is one of the reasons why we love white Christmases so. The clean, white snow on the ground and in the trees covers the gray, dull, lifeless scenes of winter.

If you've stained a white shirt, what is your best hope for getting that stain out? Immediately soak it in cold water? Maybe some "Shout" stain remover? Maybe some bleach? You will definitely want to use some sort of strong detergent in hopes of getting that stain out. But imagine you have a white t-shirt that you spilled grape juice on - would you ever consider throwing it in the wash and putting in a cup of blood to remove that stain? Of course not! That would only make a new stain. You'd pull that shirt out of the wash to find it red instead of white.

As John is given a vision of heaven he says he saw people from all over the earth. People of different nationalities. People that all speak different languages. People that have different skin color. People that are from different families. But what do all these different people have in

common? They are believers in Christ. These are the believers who have died and gone to Paradise to be with the Lord forever. Along with the angels and the elders, this innumerable throng is in the throne room of the Triune God worshipping and adoring their King. And notice how John describes their appearance - they are wearing white robes. They are pure and clean.

One of the elders asks John about that great multitude which no one could number. **“Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?”** John knows that the man who asked him knows the answer. **“Sir, you know,”** John replies. **“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** These standing before the throne are those who endured the tribulation of this world and were faithful unto death. They are believers like Stephen, Moses, and Elijah. These are believers who have died and gone to heaven.

What are we told about the robes that the saints in heaven are wearing? They are wearing robes that needed to be washed. If something needs to be washed that implies it was dirty and needed to be cleaned. The picture language we are given here is a description of the life of the Christian - it needs to be cleansed. Isaiah pictures our lives this way - **“We are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.”** (Is 64:6) WE are unclean. Even our most righteous of acts - what we think to be righteous - are like filthy, soiled rags in God’s sight. Even one little stain of sin shows up on the background of white of God’s holiness. We needed to be cleansed from our sin.

So what does the elder say is the cleaning agent that made these sin-stained robes white? **“(They) washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** Wait a minute! Who would use blood to make something clean and white?! Wouldn’t blood only make it more stained? Not when the blood being used to clean is the holy, precious blood of the Lamb of God! In 1 John 1:7 we hear that **“the blood of Jesus Christ (God’s) Son cleanses us from all sin.”** This blood is able to cleanse because it is not the blood of just any man, but the blood of the Son of God made Man. The blood of Christ is such a powerful cleaning agent that it is able to make us white, clean, and holy in God’s sight. The blood of His Son is able to wash away all the sin in our lives and make us pure and holy before Him.

White really is a fitting color for Christmas! That holy, pure Christ-child was born to make us clean! The Son of God took on flesh and blood to shed that blood and die for our sins. By His red blood we are cleansed. As the Lord says in Isaiah chapter 1, **“Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”** (Is 1:18) Through faith in Christ we are wearing the white robes of righteousness. There is not a spot or stain to be seen.

When you think of having a white Christmas or see the pure white snow scattered on the ground or falling from the clouds, may it be a reminder of why Jesus came. He came to make you holy. The true Son of God from eternity took on flesh and blood so that He could shed that blood to make you clean. Now every believer in Christ, cleansed by His blood, is as clean and pure as the wind driven snow. Praise be to God for giving us a “White Christmas!” Amen.